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To: Servicing Personnel Officers

From: Acting Director, National Human Resources Management Center

Subject: Evaluation of Higher Education in Making Basic Qualification Determinations for Professional Positions

Questions continue to arise regarding the evaluation of higher education in making basic qualification determinations for professional positions. Servicing personnel offices often apply the qualification standards differently, giving rise to frustration in the workforce. These differences do not appear to be based on the position being filled, but rather on different interpretations of the regulation. To address this problem, the staffing community requested guidance on evaluating higher education for professional positions be issued for Bureauwide application. While guidance will not totally resolve the problem, it may resolve some of the concerns raised by employees.

Title 5 U.S.C. 3308 permits the establishment of minimum educational requirements only when the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has determined that the work cannot be performed by persons who do not possess the prescribed minimum education. The same minimum educational requirements apply to all applicants and employees, including employees detailed to an occupational series with minimum educational requirements.

When evaluating a combination of education and experience, the quality of this combination must be sufficient to demonstrate that the applicant possesses the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform work in the occupation, and is comparable to that normally acquired through the successful completion of a bachelor's degree with a major in the appropriate field.

The nature and quality of the education must have been such that it would serve as a prerequisite for more advanced study (graduate level or professional education). Educational course work

may be at either the undergraduate or graduate level. However, it must include a large percentage of upper level (junior/senior) course work. Course titles and numbers may help determine level. (Courses entitled “Introduction to . . .” or with numbers beginning with A or 1 are almost always lower level courses.). College course catalogs can also help you determine which courses are appropriate.

A typical business example is Accounting, GS-510. The qualification standard requires that in order to qualify on a combination of education and experience, the applicant must have 24 semester hours of accounting or auditing courses, of which up to 6 semester hours can be in business law.

The University of Colorado, Denver (CU-Denver), requires the following accounting and business courses for a degree in accounting: (Be sure to notice how the courses are numbered.)

- ACCT 2100 Introduction to Managerial Accounting (3 units)
- ACCT 2110 Financial Accounting and Financial Statement Analysis (3 units) or  
ACCT 2120 Introduction to Financial Accounting (3 units)
- ACCT 3220 Intermediate Financial Accounting I (3 units)
- ACCT 3230 Intermediate Financial Accounting II (3 units)
- ACCT 3320 Intermediate Cost Accounting (3 units)
- ACCT 4000+ Free electives (6 units)
  
- BLAW 3000 Legal, Ethical, and Social Environments of Business I (3 units)
- BLAW 4120 Legal, Ethical, and Social Environments of Business II (3 units)

For transfer students from the Community College of Denver, CU-Denver requires the following business courses:

- ACC 121 Accounting Principles I (3 units)
- ACC 122 Accounting Principles II (3 units)
- ACC 221 Cost Accounting (3 units)
- BUS 221 Business Law (3 units)

Federal employees will frequently take the full range of accounting courses at the community college, as they believe it will meet the 24 semester hour requirement. In addition to the above courses, they will also take:

- ACC 211 Intermediate Accounting (3 units)
- ACC 215 Accounting Systems (3 units)
- ACC 216 Governmental and Not-for-Profit Accounting (3 units)
- ACC 225 Managerial Finance (3 units)

Of the above classes, only ACC 121, ACC 122, ACC 221, and BUS 221 would be counted

toward the 24 semester hours as they are required prerequisites. The other four courses can be credited toward meeting general education requirements, but would not be used to meet the minimum education requirement.

Where specific course requirements are not indicated in an individual occupation requirement, the number of semester hours required to constitute a major field of study is the amount specified by the college or university attended. If this number cannot be obtained, 24 semester hours will be considered as equivalent to a major field of study.

In addition to courses in the major and related fields, a typical college degree would have included courses that involved analysis, writing, critical thinking, and research. These courses would have provided an applicant with skills and abilities to perform progressively more responsible work in the occupation. Therefore, creditable experience must have demonstrated similarly appropriate skills or abilities needed to perform the work of the occupation.

In a very few case's OPM has authorized alternative methods of qualification such as passage of a certified examination or evaluation by a panel as meeting the requirements for general experience. The Accounting Series, GS-510, is one of those series. While rare, both options have been used within BLM. More information on using panels to determine basic qualifications can be found on page II-15 of the qualification standards operating manual.

Most of the above information can also be applied to administrative and management positions. Specific information on the above and qualifying applicants based on education can be found in the OPM *Operating Manual Qualification Standards for General Schedule Position*.

Questions regarding the above information should be addressed to Melissa Dukes, HR-210. Melissa can be reached via electronic mail or by calling (303) 236-6689.

Signed:  
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